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III.—PRACTICAL PHILOLOGY.¹

The people of this country are commonly supposed to be in a high degree practical, and the word is often used in praise of Americans as possessing a clear vision of the hard facts of life and as governing their conduct accordingly, so as to get the best results possible. The typical American is supposed to be a practical man, not an idealist or a misty theorizer absorbed in meditations that lead to nothing. But the same word may also be used to imply a reproach, not the less real for being covert; it may suggest that ours is a civilization which looks upon material prosperity as the highest good and cares but little if at all for whatever is intangible. That our colleges and universities attract a large number of students of capacity and industry is good evidence that the young men of this country do not all understand success in life to be synonymous with the acquisition of wealth. But it cannot be said that we have in our universities all the students we want. There is still room for a great increase in their numbers before we need feel that there is any risk for us of an intellectual proletariat.

We certainly do not wish to increase the number of students by having our universities become practical in any low sense of the word. But if we have definite work to do and definite aims in our work, there must be a choice in methods; some are better than others, and a recognition of the conditions under which we live and have to do our work is implied in the word practical. It is this that I have in mind when I speak of practical philology. If philology is to maintain or improve its position among university studies, if it is to do all that it can do and to do it in the best

¹ An address delivered in Cambridge by Professor Sheldon, as President of the Association, on the 26th of December, 1901.—Ed.

possible way, it must be practical in this sense. I do not mean by saying that philology should be practical, that it should be so studied and taught that the student may be able when he leaves the university to use it as a means of gaining a livelihood.

It is my purpose to speak in the first place of some misconceptions or misunderstandings of philology on its purely linguistic side which may hamper us in the work of teaching. If I speak of these misunderstandings and contrast with them the views of modern philology as I understand these latter, it is because, in spite of all that has been written on linguistic science, they are still very prevalent among educated people. It is quite possible that in some details not all philologists would agree entirely with me, but I hope such disagreement would be only in details. In the second place I intend to say a few words about the final work of candidates for the degree of doctor of philosophy, and I shall then add some remarks on the study of literature in its relations to linguistic science.

Before taking up the purely linguistic matters a general observation may be permitted, one that applies not to teachers of philology alone, but to all university teachers. It is obvious that it is not for our interest to put any unnecessary obstacles in the path of the votary of learning. The attractions of the scholar's career are real enough and strong enough to draw an increasing number of students to our universities if we will allow those attractions a fair chance. Let not the scholars of any branch of learning set themselves apart as a chosen few who look askance at new comers. Anything like an attempt to create or revive a spirit of caste, an aristocracy of learning, is in this country at least out of place. On the contrary, if a clearer understanding of the nature of our work will bring about a legitimate increase in the number of our students or otherwise help us, then we should further that clearer understanding.

Among the misconceptions which embarrass us, especially at the outset, in our teaching is the narrow view often taken

of the relation of grammar to language and of the dictionary to language. People are accustomed to look upon grammar as containing the rules to which they must conform in the use of language, whether the language be Greek, Latin, German, French, or English, and they are only too apt to think that the larger English dictionaries contain all the words that anybody has the right to use in speaking or writing English, and that any word in the dictionary may be so used. This view of grammar as a code of laws is almost inevitable in the study of a dead language with a highly developed inflexional system, such as classic Latin, and it may be admissible as a matter of convenience for teaching the facts of any language to schoolboys. But it would be of some assistance to us if the views of philologists on grammar, dictionary, and language were better known. We should then hardly need to explain that we look upon grammar simply as the description of the structure of a language, of its condition during some definite period in its constantly changing history, and that to us a dictionary is a more or less incomplete list of the words and phrases used in a language in some period of its life, with definitions (often inexact) of these words and phrases.

If merely a theoretical question of definition of the words grammar and dictionary were at issue, no great harm would be done by this difference in the understanding of these words. Unfortunately the not wholly unjustifiable notion of grammar which I have mentioned as common is bound up with and is in part the cause of certain other misconceptions which are the harder to correct because they are not all entirely and absolutely wrong, and because they concern the question of the standard of correctness in speech. I am thinking of the opinions of educated people in general about what is right and what is wrong in language, opinions which are sometimes pretty firmly held, but which often must be unlearned or modified before the student can take the proper view of questions of linguistics.

For example, the student has to learn to distinguish between the state of things in English speaking and writing among the educated, where we all try to conform to a standard, the standard of good usage, and the state of things in philological work, where ordinarily and properly no attempt is made to set off certain existing linguistic usages as right and others as wrong. The investigator may be reproached with not using right methods, that is, with not conforming strictly to the proper philological methods, but the objects of his investigation, the phenomena of language, are to him in general all equally right, or, rather, the question what is right and what is wrong does not arise at all.

So far as the student's notions of correct English recognize good usage as the standard we meet no serious difficulty. But sometimes, more or less consciously, a different standard is set up. For the purposes of linguistic science the normal form of language is not the written language, but the spoken language, and it is also the natural, careless, unconscious, colloquial speech which furnishes the philologist with his best illustrative and explanatory material, because this is freest from intrusive artificial influences. In our vocabulary we recognize the important division into learned and popular words, a division which is of such importance in the Romance languages, and we find that in English as in those languages the popular or familiar words have obeyed with great strictness certain laws of phonetic change, while the learned words are not thus regular, and they even seem to the philologist to be barbarous intrusions which interfere with the regular and harmonious development of the language. Just so it is the colloquial pronunciations which the student of linguistics must observe and which to him seem most important as being most regular. To him the pronounced word is the word, its written form is only of secondary importance, though the latter may also be of value and even of great value to him. When these two forms, the written and the spoken, disagree, it is the latter which is or should be in his

eyes the more important. Of course this applies to popular words primarily, and the more learned a word is the less important its pronunciation is to him in his study of the natural growth and changes of the language.

Here now arises opportunity for a misunderstanding, and the philologist himself, if he is not on his guard, may be to blame for it, at least in part. We all, philologists as well as others, must accept the principle that in the use of language, whether it be a question of syntax that arises or one about the proper pronunciation of a word, good usage is decisive. The question of the right pronunciation of a word is not one for the philologist as such to decide, for it is a question not what the facts of pronunciation are, but what usage is accepted as the best, and his knowledge on that point may or may not be of value. But if a person is known to be a philologist he may be asked to give his opinion as one who is an expert in the historical study of the language and who can accordingly tell what pronunciation ought to be adopted. Let him not accept this erroneous view of his functions as a philologist. He can perhaps tell what would be the regular pronunciation if phonetic laws were observed without any interference of disturbing influences, but it does not follow that that regular pronunciation is really the correct one. Good usage is the tribunal to be appealed to, not the philologist, however learned he may be. The philologist must be careful not to put philology in a false position.

Good usage can sometimes be alleged on both sides of a question of pronunciation, and in this case the philologist is perhaps justified in casting the weight of his opinion in favor of one side or the other. But even then he must be cautious, and it will often if not usually be best to recognize both sides as right, or at least not to assume that either is wrong. Sometimes a basis in the history of the language can be found for different pronunciations, as in the case of words containing an *r* final or before a consonant, such as *star*, *cord*, *word*. Those Americans who do not pronounce this *r* in the same

way as an *r* at the beginning of a word, but substitute for it a vowel-like murmur or nothing at all can defend their pronunciation on historical grounds just as those other Americans also can do who pronounce the *r* alike in all places where it occurs in the written word. Neither side need call the other wrong; we may leave it to the future to decide which, if either, will ultimately be recognized as the only right pronunciation.

Most Americans, when in doubt what pronunciation has the sanction of the best usage, consult a dictionary, and I see no occasion for blaming them for accepting that as the best authority within their reach. If they accept it as an absolutely final or infallible authority they are in error and may be blamed. Now it seems to me that the dictionaries do not give sufficient attention to good colloquial usage, but rather indicate a pronunciation which would sometimes sound a little affected in ordinary conversation, or which is perhaps a little archaic. It would be well if they gave, in case the facts of good colloquial usage justify it, at least two pronunciations for words frequently used in conversation; one that which they give now, the other representing something like the colloquial English which Sweet has tried to represent in his *Elementarbuch des gesprochenen Englisch* and in his *Primer of Spoken English*. That this would not be an easy task may be granted, that Sweet's pronunciation sometimes seems to us Americans a little vulgar may also be granted, but that the thing he has attempted is desirable for this country, and perhaps for different parts of this country, as well as for England, seems to me clear. I believe it might even be done in such a way as to have a conservative influence in both countries, and that it would not necessarily encourage diversity of usage. Something of this sort is, to be sure, attempted in dictionaries, but it is at best hardly more than a beginning that has been made. Let me illustrate. In the admirable Oxford dictionary I find *annunciation* with the *c* pronounced like *s*, but *enunciation* with *c* like *sh*.

It seems evident that both pronunciations exist in good usage for each of these nouns in England as well as in America, but only one is recognized for each, and that one is not the same in the two cases.¹ In the preface to the first volume of the same work (p. x) we are told that the editor heard at a meeting of a learned society the adjective formed from *gas* (*gaseous*) "systematically pronounced in six different ways by as many eminent physicists." Presumably, then, all six could claim the support of some reputable usage. If the proper function of a dictionary is to register certain facts of language of which pronunciation is one, may we not fairly ask for the facts of pronunciation, at least those of presumably good usage, as well as those of spelling and of the meanings of words? Without them the history of the word is incomplete, and until the facts of actual usage are known can anyone be trusted to tell what is the best usage without very great risk of errors? In this particular case the Oxford Dictionary gives two pronunciations for the word in its alphabetical place, one American dictionary also gives two, one of them not in the other work, and another gives one, and that not a new one. The pronunciation most familiar to me is not recognized by any of these three dictionaries, but in spite of that I think it is probably in good colloquial usage in both England and America. Such cases as these may serve to show how difficult and also how desirable the task here spoken of is.²

One feature of English colloquial pronunciation may be dwelt on here particularly. That is the alteration of initial or final sounds of words in the flow of speech, for the spelling gives no hint of the facts and many are hardly aware of the phenomena. Perhaps not all the following examples will

¹ The American dictionaries I have consulted recognize both pronunciations. That different persons are responsible for the letters A and E in the Oxford dictionary seems to show plainly the division of usage in England.

² It is perhaps necessary to say that no slur is intended to be cast on the great dictionary mentioned above. Its very excellence tempts one to ask of it more than can perhaps be justly demanded.

be universally accepted as representing really good colloquial usage, but I hope no one will reject them offhand. In *this year* pronounced slowly no such effect is noticed, but if it is pronounced as the phrase naturally would be in ordinary conversation, you observe that instead of the final *s* in *this* there is produced, under the influence of the following *y*, nearly or quite the sound we commonly write *sh*. So in *that year, don't you*, as naturally pronounced, you may hear what we should write *ch*. If instead of *s* and *t* we have *z* or *d* as the final sound—as in *here is your brother* (the *s* in *is* means *z*), *did you*—we get a similar result; in one case we hear the sound badly expressed by *s* in *pleasure*, in the other that of *j* in *judge*. The phenomenon is the same as that seen and universally accepted in such words as *aversion* (nobody says *aversyon*), *question*, *vision*, *soldier*, and we may doubtless add the colloquial forms at least of such words as *nature* and the other words in *-ture, verdure, gradual*. Obviously the phrases mentioned above are pronounced in this way because of the close connection in sense between the words, which brings the final and the initial consonants as closely together as if they were actually in the same word. I do not add this as the true reason for using these pronunciations; it is only an explanation of what has happened. These pronunciations are not right because they are in accordance with philological principles; they are right (or I think them so) because they are in accordance with good usage.

I might add something in a similar line on the pronunciation of *at* followed by *all* (*at all*), and on the pronunciation of the written *a great deal* like *a gray deal*, and I might ask whether any thing could be said in favor of such and other similar pronunciations. But what has been said may suffice, and indeed some may question whether all this does not amount to recommending a vulgar kind of colloquial English as strictly correct. Such is of course not my purpose. I mean to recommend nothing that is not in perfectly good usage. It is true that really vulgar colloquialisms may have

an interest for the philologist; that is because he views them from the purely philological standpoint. But in the matter we have been considering the question is one of right and wrong for us nowadays, and in such a question the philologist as such has no standing. Good usage must be decisive, whether this usage be logical or not, whether it have a historically satisfactory basis or not. Colloquial English does not necessarily mean vulgar English. It may not always be easy to tell what good usage sanctions, but that does not compel us to give up the recognition of good colloquial English to be used as well as a more formal English, each in its proper place. For ordinary conversation or for the much neglected art of reading aloud (in most cases), whether in the family circle or among friends, it is the former that is preferable and that will be used, even if ideal correctness in its use is not attained.

The relation between spelling and pronunciation has already been touched upon, but the importance of the subject and the common feeling that the spelling is right and that therefore it should determine the pronunciation make it well to say something here on that subject. We may observe also how our bad spelling hampers observation of linguistic processes.

It is well known that French words taken into our language during the Middle English period have since been to a large extent refashioned, so as to resemble more closely the classical Latin words from which they came. This later and, as we may say, unhistorical spelling has in several instances affected pronunciation, especially in words not the most familiar, though some are not wholly unpopular. Thus the words *recognize* and *recognizance* have taken and kept a *g* under the influence of Latin (or of a French spelling now abandoned and itself in imitation of Latin), and in the former word the *g* is regularly sounded, though in the latter the lawyers at least have not yet adopted the new pronunciation. So too in *fault* and *assault* the *l* was originally an etymological blunder, but we pronounce it in both words. We now

write *falcon* for older *faucon*, but the *l* has not yet acquired so firm a hold on the pronunciation that the older sound is quite lost. But the new one with audible *l* will probably drive it out entirely before long, for the word is hardly popular. Or, observe the Old French word for "body," spelt *cors*.¹ This gave us the word *corse*, now only poetical, while the originally learned *corpse* came from the late French spelling *corps* (with silent *p*), and this word now has in English a pronounced *p* and is decidedly more popular than *corse*.

Such instances show that a bad spelling may come to affect pronunciation, even in pretty popular words. Artificial influences of this sort are displeasing to the student of linguistic science, but for languages in their modern stages they must be reckoned with as new and, if you choose, unnatural, but still real factors in linguistic growth. But, though we must recognize their results after they have become established, we need not welcome any new ones of the same sort, and we are, on the contrary, inclined to reject all such arbitrary interference with the language. As philologists we cannot sympathize with the idea that because a word is spelt in such and such a way therefore it should be pronounced accordingly. If our natural pronunciation has no *l* in *falcon* we need not change it on account of the spelling, and if we naturally pronounce *haunt* with the vowel sound of *a* in *father* we need not change because *au* generally means the sound heard in *awe*, just as we do not feel obliged to pronounce the word *virtuals* in accordance with its bad spelling.

It has been observed that our spelling sometimes hampers us in linguistic studies. Let us return for a moment to the phrase *this year*, where we saw the sound of *sh* resulting from *s* followed by *y*, just as in the word *aversion*, while *t* followed

¹ It is curious that there is a spelling *corps* in the oldest known French poem belonging in the ninth century. But we may feel pretty sure that ever since the Norman conquest at least no *p* has been pronounced in this word in French.

by *y* produced our *ch*, as in *don't you* and *question*. There is a whole group of words, namely, almost all those in *-tion*, such as *nation*, *abbreviation*, etc., which seem to form a striking exception, for they show *t*, not *s*, and yet the sound is *sh*, not *ch*. If you will look at the history of such words you will see that the spelling is an obstacle to the easy perception and explanation of the truth. The pronunciation of words of this class was determined by the large number of them that came into our language from French centuries ago. The Old French had, as learned words, many of these, and it commonly wrote them with a *c*, this *c* having at first the sound of *ts* and later of *s*. In English these words were naturally enough written with a *c*, and as the French sound of the *c* became simply *s* (as in modern French) so this *c* meant *s* in English. Historically, then, this *-tion* is a bad spelling for *-sion*, and these words are not the exceptions they at first seemed to be.

Indeed we may say in general that etymological spelling inevitably hampers the student of linguistics more or less, because it gives no hint of the actual changes through which the language has passed in the last centuries; it ignores, or rather it conceals a great part of the history of the language.

Does this mean that English orthography ought to be reformed completely? Not necessarily. That is a question which concerns many others besides philologists. It is enough here to point out that for students of the history of our language our present spelling is not really a help but rather a hindrance, and that this would still be the case even if the etymological principle of spelling were carried through without error.

Perhaps enough has now been said to illustrate the importance of having the bases of the linguistic side of philology made as generally intelligible as possible. I pass now to the student's own work in preparation for the doctor's degree, and particularly to that part of it which usually marks the close of his student life at the university, the writing of his

dissertation. That he has been trained to strict intellectual honesty is assumed, and it is to certain minor but still important matters that I would direct his attention and that of the instructors who have been guiding him on his way.

In writing his dissertation let him not be regardless of literary form. Not that the graces of style are to be expected in all dissertations, but let the language at least be correctly used, and, above all, let the meaning be always clear; not simply intelligible after careful reading and perhaps rereading, but if possible unmistakable at the first reading. Prolixity should be avoided, but there is an even worse fault, that of excessive brevity, which causes obscurity and makes too great demands on the reader's time. It is dangerous to try to pack as much meaning into as few words as possible; it does not always mean a saving of time. With the same end in view, namely, clearness, let every reference and every quotation be verified, let the punctuation be looked after with care, and finally let the proof-reading be done with the most scrupulous exactness. That scholars of good repute have been guilty of some of the negligences against which these cautions are uttered is no excuse for the young writer to do likewise. Practical work in philology and other subjects as well must take serious account of such matters as these, and no one can afford to scorn them as of little importance. ,

Thus far we have considered mainly linguistic matters. But language and literature are usually combined in our higher institutions of learning, and this will doubtless always be the case. If it is desirable not to be unpractical in studying and teaching linguistics, is it not also well to be equally careful as regards literature, lest time be wasted in ill-directed or unintelligent study?

As a proper branch of study in a university literature must be studied with definite aims and methods. Thus, new truth must be sought for, and the processes of growth and development, or, it may be, of decay must be studied in order that they may be understood. This means, among other things,

that reading and study must not be confined to the great masterpieces in any literature. That would be a very inadequate way to study the subject, and it is one wholly unworthy of a university in these modern times. Not that we undervalue the subtle refining influence of the best literature, nor that we do not desire that influence to have its full effect on mind and character, but to set up the study of the best literature as the whole purpose of our work devoted to literature would encourage the common vague conception of literary study, and would discourage at least one kind of serious study, which, to be sure, involves the reading of some productions of small merit, but which by giving us a better knowledge of the origin and sources of the great masterpieces enables us to understand and appreciate them better than before. Let us also tell young men or women who wish to study literature that a sound linguistic training is necessary, that they must learn to weigh the meanings of words and of grammatical constructions most carefully, must acquire a feeling for the force of the subjunctive mood in Latin and in French, and in general must form the habit of close and accurate observation of apparently trifling things. Without such a training, though they may appreciate much, they will inevitably miss something of the finer touches in the great authors they read. Of course they need not forget, while acquiring this linguistic equipment, that their ultimate purpose is not linguistic study, but a certain modicum of thorough linguistic training is essential for their later studies.

It would be a mistake to allow all students to imagine that the study of literature is in itself something higher and nobler than linguistic studies, that the latter are really only valuable as leading up to this higher and nobler work. Some study of literature is doubtless higher and nobler than some linguistic study, but the converse is also true. The preparation for the study of any period of literature in any modern language is quite as arduous as that for similar work in linguistics, for it involves not only some training in linguistic

methods, it requires also some acquaintance with literature in more languages than one and in more periods of time than one. Both linguistics and literature are proper university studies, and each will attract the proper type of mind. Not every student ought to study either as his most important subject, and the friends of neither should disparage the other. Which of the two will prove of the greater benefit to humanity we need not ask; it is hardly a practical question for us, since we can feel sure that both are useful and will long continue to be useful. Moreover the two are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, each, if studied as it should be, involves some acquaintance with the other. The student of linguistics may and often does read less of good literature than is desirable, and he may pursue his studies in a narrow spirit, never, for example, thinking of the light that the history of words throws on the history of civilization, or of the historical study of syntax as illustrating the workings of the human mind dealing with the problems of expression. But narrow minds are not the minds to judge by in estimating the worth of university study, and we may hope that in our universities both these branches of study will continue to flourish, each doing its work with its utmost skill and each coöperating constantly with the other. There should be no dissensions in the camp of philology.

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